

WASHINGTON- Congressman Lee Terry (R-NE) sent a letter to President-Elect Barack Obama urging him to help fund the astronomical cost of Omaha's combined sewer separation projects. Terry released the following statement:

"Omaha faces a burdensome and unfunded mandate to fix the city's sewer infrastructure. While I believe this project is greatly needed, the cost of the fix carries a heavy financial toll on the city and its residents. I urge President-Elect Obama to direct portions of his stimulus bill to pay for Omaha's sewer upgrades not only in Omaha but also across the country. This is a unique opportunity for the federal government to help fund the additional compliance costs it has forced on local communities. Sewers are an important part of our nations aging infrastructure and they should not be overlooked."

[Here is the letter:](#)

January 14, 2009

President-Elect Barack Obama

The White House

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Elect Obama:

The Clean Water Act of 1972 requires communities across the country - including Omaha, Nebraska - to undertake one of the largest and most burdensome unfunded federal mandates ever conceived. The admittedly worthwhile goal of this mandate is to make our nations' waterways swimmable and fishable by separating aging combined sewers. However, as is often the case, the consequences of providing clean water results in average Americans having to bear significant costs.

The City of Omaha has been required to reduce the number of raw sewage overflows per year to the Missouri River and the Papillion Creek from over fifty down to four. More importantly, the City has been left with the obligation of paying for this project that is estimated to exceed \$1.5 billion.

In Omaha , combined sewers occupy an area of approximately 51 square miles, mostly in older neighborhoods that are populated by middle and lower income families who are living in homes built in the early to mid 1900s.

The sewer infrastructure here is old, designed and laid in the 1800s to move wastewater and storm water away from urban areas. In times of wet weather it overflows, often times onto public streets and into private homes.

Beginning in the 1960s the City of Omaha began to take affirmative steps to address this problem, constructing diversionary structures, interceptor sewers and pumping stations to direct sanitary sewage to treatment plants before being discharged into the Missouri River.

In August, 2007 the City of Omaha began taking affirmative steps to address the unfunded mandate placed on it by the federal government. Current estimates indicate that work will need to continue for the next fifteen to twenty years in order to comply with federal regulations related to sewer overflows.

Total cost estimates for project completion are \$1.5 billion and the City anticipates that residential customers could be looking at sewer rates of \$50 or more per month.

Such a burdensome cost for something as fundamental as water will exact a heavy financial toll on Omaha residents.

The people living in the older and more urban areas of our city are likely to face difficult challenges in the coming years, especially those related to energy costs, food and healthcare.

The economic stimulus bill you are proposing offers a unique opportunity to lessen the impact of federal policy on these families.

As you continue to shape your economic stimulus bill, I urge you to direct significant portions of that money to pay for combined

sewer separation projects.

The federal government has
forced this mandate on at least

772 different communities across the country, requiring a massive expenditure on infrastructure while giving them no means to pay for it.

Lessening the burdens of low and middle-income people who are paying for something the federal government imposed on them is the right and fair thing to do.

The proposed stimulus offers a unique opportunity for your new Administration to address 's infrastructure needs and I urge you to designate a significant

portion of that stimulus to address combined sewer separation projects not just in Omaha , but across the country.

Sincerely,

Lee Terry

Member of Congress

